FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE TO INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS' REFLECTION

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Abstract: Current developments in English Language Teaching (ELT) have heightened the urgent need for intercultural competence as being another essential skill in contemporary language education. Today's EFL teachers are required to possess intercultural competencies to effectively assist students in raising their intercultural awareness. This study aims to examine teachers' international experiences regarding the development of their intercultural competence, utilizing the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) proposed by Bennett (1986, 2017) as the framework. Through the application of a multiple narrative approach, we analyzed the stories of two higher education teachers, collected via document study and three-cycle interviews. The results demonstrate the

complexities of teachers' intercultural competence development and highlight an important aspect: one's intercultural progression, as they may flexibly alter based on the situation and condition faced at a given moment.

Keywords: *intercultural competence, international experience, teachers' experience*

INTRODUCTION

Current developments in English Language Teaching (ELT) have heightened the urgent need for intercultural competence as being another essential skill in today's language education. Since English is becoming a lingua franca, serving as a communication medium for global society, attaining communicative competence only in English learning has been considered insufficient in today's language pedagogy (Byram, et al. 2013; Byram & Wagner 2018; Kramsch 2014). English learners need to be encouraged not only to communicate effectively but also to be equipped with "the ability to decenter and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating, and where possible, resolving dysfunction in communication and behavior" (Byram 1997). Consequently, EFL teachers, as 'key brokers' in promoting interculturalism in the classroom (Young & Sachdev 2011), are required to have intercultural competencies so that they can create an intercultural learning environment to help students raise their intercultural awareness and sensitivity.

This pedagogical paradigm shift has been recognized by most EFL teachers (Young & Schadev 2011; Tran & Dang 2014; Li 2016; Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño 2018; Biebricher, et al. 2019; Chau & Truong 2019; Marwa et al. 2021). Young and Schadev (2011), for example, reported that 93.2% of teachers in their study agreed on the importance of promoting Intercultural Competence (IC) in an EFL course to increase students' international understanding. Biebricher, et al. (2019) also revealed that the two participants involved in their research expressed interest and willingness to connect language

learning with culture and intercultural understanding. Meanwhile, Marwa et al. (2021) reported that teachers in their study presented both local and neutral cultural topics in their classroom activities as an effort to help students build their intercultural awareness.

On the contrary, most studies also indicate challenges in implementing (Intercultural Language Teaching) ILT into classroom teaching practice. Despite the lack of learner interest, curricular support, suitable textbook material, and intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) testing being cited obstructions leading to unsuccessful ILT implementation (Young & Sachdev 2011), the lack of teacher's knowledge in incorporating intercultural competence has been identified as one of the problems in implementing ILT in the language classroom (Byram 2014; Lazar 2011; Young and Sachdev 2011; Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño 2017; Oranje & Smith 2017; Tolosa, et al. 2018; Biebricher, et al. 2019). Teachers still tend to focus on culturally neutral content, prioritizing grammatical accuracy without raising students' cultural awareness (Lazar 2011). Meanwhile, Young and Sachdev (2011) —cited the work of Duff and Uchida (1997) and Lazaraton (2003)—point out that teachers often perceive culture and cultural differences more as problems or constraints rather than as learning resources to contextualize and enhance students' motivation and learning.

Given the importance of teacher's intercultural competence, professional development aimed at assisting them in exploring intercultural aspects in language teaching is worth to be taken into consideration (Tolosa, et al. 2018; Biebriecher, et al. 2019; Young & Sachdev 2011). Apart from facilitating teachers' attendance at intercultural training, exposing them to experiences living in different cultural environment or with people who are culturally different— often referred to as the length of time living abroad (DeJaeghere & Zhang 2008)—may help them enhance their intercultural sensitivity and competence (Willard-Holt, 2001; DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008). International experiences may foster teacher's positive personal and professional growth (Willard-Holt, 2001; Sahin, 2008), particularly in

areas such as empathy, tolerance, flexibility, patience, and self-confidence, which they can then transfer into their classroom teaching practice (Willard-Holt, 2001).

However, few studies exploring teachers' international experience have been found. Research on international experience in relation to intercultural competence has focused more on students' experiences rather than on teachers', as seen in studies by Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004); Williams (2005); Gu and Schweisfurth (2006); McAllister et al. (2006); Heuser (2012); Santoro (2014); Jackson (2018); Taguchi and Collentine (2018); Peng and Wu (2019). The studies conducted by Willard-Holt (2001) and Sahin (2008), mainly focused on pre-service teachers' experiences. Willard-Holt (2001) addressed the potential benefits of cross-cultural experiences for pre-service teachers, finding that they demonstrated substantive knowledge of other cultures by integrating cultural content into their teaching. Similarly, Sahin (2008) revealed that an international internship program for student-teachers promoted positive, professional and personal development and raised their cultural awareness. Additionally, Sahin mentioned that attendance in the internship program was mutually beneficial for both student-teachers and host-students. However, the focus of these two studies has been on pre-service teachers. Research on in-service teachers and their international experiences related to intercultural competence development has received less attention.

While previous research has indicated that international— sometimes called cross-cultural— experience brings benefits for both students and teachers, Bennett (2012) still questions the impact of this experience on individual intercultural sensitivity development. He argues that experience living in another country does not automatically indicate that individuals are engaged in intercultural encounters and learning. "They may learn something about the target culture, but that kind of culture-learning is different than intercultural learning" (Bennett, 2012: 6). He further questioned the outcome of international experience on the acquisition and comprehension of cultural

knowledge and concepts. Therefore, he suggests that there should be more empirical evidence in this area of study.

Capturing the lack of empirical evidence of an in-service teacher's international experience related to their intercultural sensitivity and competence development, this study attempts to fill this research gap. The present study examines (1) what intercultural experiences do teachers have during their international engagement in other countries? and (2) how do these experiences contribute to their intercultural competence development? Using Bennett's (1986, 2017) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) as a conceptual framework, this study explores how teachers' intercultural competence develops during their time spent abroad.

DMIS was developed by Milton J. Benneth in 1986 and 2013. In his DMIS framework, he appraised the sequence of competence acquisition by describing the developmental process through the movement of individuals in different stages of a sequential position along a continuum. By considering constructivism and communication theory as his theoretical basis, he argued that "the experience of reality is constructed through perception, and that more complex perceptual categories yield more complex (sophisticated) experience". He further assumes that people's experience is a function of their perceptual organization of reality (Bennett, 2017).

DMIS offers two main stages of intercultural sensitivity development continuum within each of which contains three stages. Those are Ethnocentrism with three stages of development: denial, defense and minimization; and Ethnorelativism with three stages; acceptance, adaptation and integration. Ethnocentrism is "Experience of one's own culture", while Ethnorelativism is "the experience of one's own belief and behaviors as just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities' ' (Benneth, 2004). Individuals with "ethnocentric" views will construct the reality with their own personal cultural background as their framework or reference, whereas people with "ethnorelative" point of view will see their own culture as a part of other multiple cultures (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004).

By living abroad, teachers are exposed to diverse cultural environments and promote self-reflection, understanding, and adaptability, all of which are essential aspects of intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 2000). As teachers delve into new cultural environments, they encounter challenges that encourage self-reflection and personal development, ultimately improving their ability to navigate cultural diversity effectively within educational contexts. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the ways in which international experiences enhance teachers' intercultural competence, which may improve their professional practice in fostering diverse educational settings.

METHOD
Research Design

This present study employed a narrative approach. By collecting biographical narrative data from two participants (Barkhuizen, et al. 2014), this study aimed to gain insight into teachers' intercultural experiences and their contribution to their intercultural competence development. Through narrative inquiry, teachers' personal stories are constructed and deconstructed to make meaningful connections between teachers' knowledge and experience, and their day-to-day practices (Bense 2012; Kim 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007). In addition, by using a biographical narrative, teachers' actions, critical moments, events or happenings, and influential persons were analyzed resulting in stories (Zao & Poulson, 2006) as a form of teachers' authentic knowledge. Thus, by using this approach, this study captured teachers' personal experiences living in other foreign countries and how their international experiences contributed to their intercultural competence development.

Subjects of the Study

For this study, two teachers, Budi and Citra, were selected as they both have the same experience of living abroad for approximately two years in Australia, but their educational as well as their cultural

background vary remarkably. Pseudonyms were preferably used in this study to maintain the confidentiality of the informants' identities; however, we used the name Budi to identify participant 1 and Citra to identify participant 2. With only two participants, the study allows for a comprehensive, nuanced exploration of each teacher's intercultural competence growth, resulting in the gaining of rich, detailed narratives. This approach corresponds with narrative inquiry methodologies that emphasize the depth and quality of data above quantity, allowing for a focused, in-depth investigation of complicated personal and professional growth narratives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

In addition, both participants in this study were university teachers with varying length of teaching experiences. However, both had the experience of living abroad for approximately two years to pursue their master's degree under a scholarship and had never traveled abroad extensively before or after they obtained their scholarships. Additionally, at the time this study was conducted, neither participant had traveled to other countries, either for long or short-term purposes, after completing their studies. Furthermore, a more detailed account of both these teachers and their context is provided in the finding section.

Data Collection

The data of this study consisted of teachers' stories. Since the focus of the study was only on teachers' international experiences related to teachers' intercultural competence, we elicited the data from teachers' critical moment dealing with intercultural encounters during their time living in a foreign country. For that aim, we adapted Kelchtermans (1994, 1999) biographical narrative data collection and analysis procedure, as it provided a very detail procedure for conducting a biographical narrative study. Thus, in my research we applied three-cycle interviews to capture the whole picture of teachers' experiences while they lived abroad. Additionally, we also employed document study as a starting point by collecting teachers' curriculum vitae to gain a general picture of their biographical profiles, especially

in terms of their cultural and educational backgrounds as well as their international sojourn.

To collect the data, a semi-structured interview was used. The guideline was generated based on the result of studying teacher's biographical profiles. The first interview aimed to gather comprehensive information about the teachers' international experience to fill the information gaps identified in the stories obtained document study. Subsequently, the second interview consisted of two sections: the first section aimed to clarify the result of the first interview. In doing so, we asked about unclear points conveyed in the first interview and checked my tentative interpretation of the data. The result of the second interview were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify commonalities and/or the additional information to complement the previously collected stories. Following this, we re-narrated all the collected stories and sent them to the participants for their comments, which would be collected in the third interview. In the third session of the interview, we asked for clarification on unclear stories from the previous interview and/or clarification on certain interpretations of the re-narrated stories that needed to be confirmed by the participants, resulting a teachers' biographical narratives.

Data Analysis

In addition to vertical analysis, horizontal data analysis was also conducted. The teachers' biographical narratives served as the basis for conducting the second step of the analysis. In this step, the biographical narrative was systematically compared using the technique of constant comparative analysis (Kelchtermans, 1994). This involved applying a repeated pattern of close reading, developing more general interpretations and then confirming these interpretations by comparing them with the data.

FINDINGS
Stories of the Two Teachers
Informant's Profile

Budi is a Javanese-Indonesian university teacher who has strong religious background. He spent almost nine years living in Islamic boarding house while pursuing his bachelor degree. He majored in English language and literature at one of Islamic University in East Java, Indonesia. He began teaching in formal education institution from 2003 to 2016 at a vocational high school and an Islamic senior high school in East Java. He was awarded an Australian scholarship for his master's degree in 2010, undertaking a Master of Teaching English to Other Speakers of Other Language (TESOL). Therefore, he lived in Australia from 2010 to 2012 with his wife and a son. Shortly after graduating from his masters' program, he returned to Indonesia in 2012 and began teaching higher education at one of the Islamic University in Indonesia from 2013 to the present. Thus, he had approximately eight-years of experience teaching in a university.

On the other hand, Citra pursued her bachelor's degree in one of the state universities in Sumatra, a northern part of Indonesian island, majoring mechanical engineering. Before going abroad, she gained experience working with international intergovernmental organizations since 2005. Thus, she had experience working with people from other countries before living abroad. She was granted with Australian Development Scholarship from 2010 to 2012 for her master degree, undertaking a Master of International Community Development at a University in Melbourne, Australia. After completing her studying, she began teaching at a private university in Bengkulu, Sumatra, Indonesia.

Cross-Cultural Insight in Brief

Staying in Australia for an extended period allowed Budi and Citra to immerse themselves in a culture characterized by distinct norms and values that emphasized multiculturalism, diversity, informality, and egalitarianism. This exposure to a culture that values

various cultural backgrounds likely influenced their personal and professional development. Budi, with his traditional and religious educational background, may have found the Australian attitude of informality and egalitarianism particularly enlightening. Citra's prior experience in international settings likely enabled her to appreciate the direct communication and openness that are common in Australian culture. This, in turn, would have strengthened her existing professional abilities and improved her capacity to navigate multicultural surroundings with effectively.

Australia's commitment to establishing a harmonious balance between work and personal life, the significance placed on engaging in outdoor activities, and active participation in community services contributed to enhancing their experiences. Budi and Citra gained valuable insights into achieving a harmonious balance between personal well-being and work obligations through the cultural values and direct communication style highly valued in Australia. This experience would have provided them with a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of inclusivity, well-being, and social responsibility in any environment they encounter. By integrating these Australian principles into their own beliefs, they may be able to contribute to creating settings that prioritize diversity, straightforwardness, and a collective approach to addressing difficulties and capturing opportunities, regardless of their specific responsibilities.

The Dynamics of Budi's Intercultural Engagement

Budi lived in Adelaide, a city in the south part of Australia, where many Indonesian students were also studying in the university. Thus, although he lived in another country with totally different cultural background, he did not find it difficult to adjust to the new situation since he had many friends from the same country who were able to help him with cultural adjustment. During the first two weeks of his arrival, he lived in an Indonesian student family in a rented house as he had not yet found his own place. Afterwards, he preferred

to rent a house together with other Indonesian students for approximately seven months.

The opportunity to live in a house with people from the same country minimized his cultural shock during his time living in abroad. However, this may have had both positive and negative effects on his intercultural competence development. On one hand, Budi had the advantage of easily receiving help to adjust himself to a new environment. On the other hand, it may have limited his opportunities to engage with different cultural environment and restricted his intercultural interactions. In this phase, Budi avoided engaging with cultural differences, which, according to Bennett (1986, 2004, 2017), placed him in the ethnocentric stage of intercultural competence development.

Budi was in the denial stage since he was uninterested in engaging with other cultural differences in his new environment by renting a house with people from the same cultural background. As Budi preferred to stay in a stable environment with the same cultural background as his home country, he certainly did not an experience living in a more multicultural neighborhood and tended to ignore the existence of "otherness" of other cultures. However, as described by Bennett (2017), people can move into defensive stance against cultural difference after being in the denial stage. This phase did not happen to Budi. He did not consider other cultures to be inferior to his own, yet his preference for living was due to the considerations of his religious belief, ensuring that he could still continue practicing.

Food is also a common and crucial issue for people from different cultural backgrounds, as their cultural belief and values often require them to adhere to dietary restrictions. Not only because of they are not accustomed to eating western food, but also religious principles are one of the main considerations in selecting food. For example, muslims should consider *Halal* and *Haram* as the main concerns when selecting food and drink. For Budi, halal and haram food were not crucial issue since he lived in a city where many other Indonesian students resided. He could easily obtain the information about *Halal*

grocery store or restaurants, or even share the food with people from the same country.

In this situation, he did not experience much cultural clash since he preferred to live with people from the same country. While from Bennett's point of view (2004, 2017) it might be considered a denial stage, from Budi's viewpoint, it was a way of respecting other people's concern regarding halal and haram, especially if they shared the kitchen. By living with others from the same country, he could freely cook or share food without hesitation. Therefore, in Budi's case, living with the same country people abroad did not imply denial of the existence of other cultures; rather, it might be considered a stage of minimization. Budi had already come to understand cultural differences, yet he found it challenging to accept other people's cultural practices. Consequently, he tended to avoid living with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

At another moment, Budi might even have been in the stage of acceptance since he believed that other people had their own culture, and he appreciated other people's cultures. This was reflected in his story when he encountered a same-sex couple. Budi was very shocked because, from his cultural point of view, it challenged his religious beliefs as well as common Indonesian cultural values. Although, at times in Indonesia, people may encounter same sex relationships, as it was happened on Glady's experience living in Indonesia (McAllister et al., 2006), such relationships were acknowledged or as prevalent as those encountered by Budi in Australia. Same-sex relationships were still considered taboo for most people in Indonesia.

This incident prompted Budi to reflect on his own culture and the host culture. He realized that he was living in another country where LGBT issues were not a significant, and thus it would be common for him to encounter such situation. He commented that "different countries have different culture". In this phase, he accepted the difference in love relationship patterns between Australia and Indonesia, yet it did not mean that he agreed with this cultural practice. At the same time, he did not pass negative judgment on the

relationship but considered it "their own culture", even though deep down, he did not feel comfortable facing this kind of unexpected incident.

Environmental and public facilities posed another issue that Budi encountered. He faced a critical moment with a toilet room, finding it unusual for him to use a dry toilet room. He disliked the Australian toilet model because he believed it remained dirty when cleaning the body without water. Consequently, he preferred to use a toilet designated for disabled people and bring a bottle of water for personal for cleaning. Personal cleanliness is obligatory for Muslims due to halal and haram concerns. Indonesian Muslims commonly clean their bodies using water, so Indonesia bathrooms are typically designed to be wet, allowing for ample water usage during cleaning. Therefore, it was unsurprising that Budi struggled to adjust to the dry rooms in Australia, as he was not accustomed to them.

On the other hand, Budi also expressed concern about water usage in Australia, a matter he had never paid much attention to before his experience of living there. Upon reflection, he realized that he had never paid much attention to the water usage, attributing it to Indonesia's abundant water supply, which led people to not prioritize water conservation. However, during his time in Australia, he found something contradictory. On one hand, he required a significant amount of water for his daily needs; on the other hand, he began to carefully consider water usage, influenced by observing how Australian paid attention to water conservation. Consequently, he became more mindful of water usage and used it more carefully, although he could not compromise on the way he cleaned himself, as it was related to his religious beliefs.

Budi also pondered the difference in people's discipline when it comes to disposing of garbage based on its types. In this case, he compared the attitudes of Australian people with those of Indonesian people in regards to rubbish disposal.

> *"People in Australia put the rubbish based on the types, red, green or yellow. In our country, even though it is like in the town square has been provided with different kind of rubbish bins, yet people are still putting the rubbish in the same place…our people is actually has been aware [of the importance], yet the problem is only in its implementation"*

Budi compared people's behavior related to garbage management. He evaluated and self-criticized the behavior of people in his country. Beside noticing about people's behavior related to garbage and water, he also learned a lot about animal welfare and plantation, subjects he had never learned about before going to Australia. As a result, he now pays great attention to animal welfare issues and grows many plants in his house as a simple part of his effort to help maintain the earth.

Academic life presented another critical moment for Budi during his experience in Australia. In Australian university, students were encouraged to work independently, and there was no apparent discrepancy in the teacher-student relationship. However, in Indonesia, religious principles strongly influenced the way students showed respect to their teachers. According to Islamic teachings, students were expected to show *tawadhu'* [obedience and respect] to their teachers in order to absorb the knowledge imparted by them. Budi acknowledged that it was important to show high respect to teachers, but he also recognized the challenge it posed for students to express their opinions during teaching and learning activities. Many students felt reluctant or afraid to do so, fearing it would be seen as disrespectfulness to their teacher.

One simple example reflecting students' respect for their teachers is the way they address them. In Indonesia, students typically address their teachers by adding "sir" or "ma'am" before their name to show respect. However, this practice is not necessary in Australia. Consequently, Budi initially felt uncomfortable addressing his Australian lecturers directly by calling their names. Gradually, he adapted to the Australian academic norms, which made him comfortable addressing his lecturers by their names directly without worrying about disrespecting them.

Another critical moment Budi faced while living in Australia was related to interaction or communication style. To warmly welcome others, locals often give big hugs to their guests or friends. However, hugging is not allowed for Muslim people, especially between male and females. Budi had an experience where he was warm welcomed by an old lady. Since it was his first time receiving non-verbal communication from a local, he found it difficult to reject the big hug offered by the woman. At that moment, he felt uncertain about whether he should accept the hug, which challenged his religious principle, or reject it, considering the woman's age. He experienced an inner conflict because hugging with individuals of the opposite ender is forbidden in his religious belief, while respecting older people is also obligatory. Consequently, in their first meeting, he responded the old woman's hug to show his respect even though it conflicted with his beliefs. However, subsequent meetings, he placed his hands together in front of his chest as a gesture indicating that he could not receive a hug from someone of a different gender. Gradually, the local people understood the meaning of his gesture and refrained from offering hugs in their following meetings.

The Dynamics of Citra's Intercultural Engagement

Since her first arrival, Citra easily adapted to a different cultural environment. Therefore, Citra had more multicultural experiences as she preferred to live with people from the host country as well as from the other countries. Upon arriving in Australia, she initially stayed with Indonesian student family for about a month. However, since their house was far from her university, she then rented a room in a local person's house near her university. The host was Australian, a single parent who also lived in the same house with her daughter and her Nepali nephew from her ex-husband, who was from Nepal. Citra developed a good relationship with the host as well as her family during her seven-month stay. Eventually, the host moved to another house which was further from the university prompting Citra to find another place to live. She rented a room in a house with other

Australian residents but the host did not live in the same house as Citra, In the third house, she lived for the remainder of her time in Australia with her friend's family from Vietnam and an American student. This opportunity provided her with rich experiences of living with people from different countries, enabling her to engage with multicultural individuals and have numerous intercultural contacts with both locals and people from different cultures. She did not doubt that she would encounter cultural clashes with others, as she had previously worked with people from different countries when she was working in her hometown before living for Australia.

Similar to Budi, Citra, at a certain moment found it challenging to move from the ethnocentrism stage to the ethno-relativism stage, particularly in her food choices. As a Muslim, she also needed to consider halal and haram concerns. However, while halal and haram were important factors in her food selection, she was more flexible with different tastes, allowing her to easily enjoy food from various countries. For instance, she consumed sushi as a substitute for rice and preferred varieties with prawn or other seafood, as all seafood is considered halal in Islamic point of view, unlike chicken or meat.

When Citra moved to a shared house with Australian people, she encountered no issues with different food selections. Halal and haram concerns did not become significant issues for her and her housemates, as the host had prior experience marrying someone from Nepal and thus understood Asian culture, including the concept of halal and haram in Islam. Consequently, she respected Citra by refraining from cooking pork or alcoholic food. As a result, they could share food without worry, as the housemate greatly respected Citra's point of view.

In another instance, Citra immersed herself in the life habits of Australian people and followed the customs of her hosts, such as celebrating birthdays, which was not a tradition in Indonesia. Observing that Australian people placed great importance on birthday celebrations, she made an effort to become more aware of her host family members' birthdays. In this case, Citra's concern for Halal and

Haram food positioned her in a stage of minimization, as she understood the cultural values of others while remaining mindful of her own religious beliefs, which could not be disregarded.

However, "it is not ethnocentric to have religious beliefs; however, it is ethnocentric to assume that people in other cultures either do or would if they could share your belief" (Bennett, 2004: 67). Interestingly, the host in Citra's case also understood Citra's religious concerns and committed herself to avoid non-Halal food in her kitchen, refraining from providing pork or alcoholic food or drinks in her house out of respect for Citra's religious beliefs. This did not necessarily mean that the host had fully accepted Citra's cultural values; rather, as the dominant culture in the household, she attempted to adapt to a non-dominant culture. Similarly, Citra, being in a non-dominant culture, also endeavored to adapt to the dominant culture, as evidenced by her participation in birthday celebrations

Love relationships also became critical moments that Citra experienced. In Indonesia, unmarried couples cannot live together before officially getting married. Even though they can visit each other's houses, women cannot stay overnight in a man's house—and vice versa—until they are married. However, Citra found an unmarried couple staying together in the house where she rented a room. Since she had prior knowledge of how other cultures handle love relationships, she was not particularly surprised by the situation. She did not intervene in the couple's affairs, even though it occurred in the same house where she lived. In this case, she was in the acceptance stage (Bennett 2004, 2017), as she was aware that it was their own culture, while still maintaining her own cultural belief that unmarried couples should not live together.

During her time in Australia, Citra also encountered differences in academic culture. On one occasion, she took a course on African studies and had a disagreement with her lecturer regarding the final result of the subject. Citra had presented the latest data on the growth of AIDS in Africa based on research results. However, the lecturer did not believe the data provided in her essay, as he was aware that the

number of AIDS victims was not as high as she had stated. Consequently, he was not satisfied with Citra's essay, considering it to be based on incorrect references. As a result, he gave her an unsatisfactory final score

Upon learning of the final score, Citra lodged a complaint with the lecturer and presented the newest references she had cited. After reviewing the references, the lecturer agreed with the data presented in her essay. However, he still did not revise the score. Eventually, Citra brought the issue to the attention of an academic consultant. She had her essay re-proofread by the consultant, who concluded that there was no problem with it. Therefore, Citra should have received a higher score than she had been given. The academic consultant contacted the lecturer, who eventually promised to review and revise Citra's final score.

In that moment, Citra had a positive experience with the dominant culture. She reflected that if it had happened in an Indonesian university context, she believed that the lecturer would have sought revenge against the student. Typically, Indonesian lecturers do not appreciate receiving complaints from students. However, this did not happen with her lecturer, as he still treated her very well. He established a good relationship with her and supported her academic advancement by providing a recommendation letter for her Ph.D. program. Citra was impressed by the lecturer's attitude; he did not let professional issues affect his personal life, which, according to her, is rarely seen in Indonesian university contexts. In this case, Citra was in the Denial stage, as she viewed her lecturer's attitude as superior while stereotypically criticizing her own national culture. This may lead either to denial of her own local cultural customs or to adaptation and integration of positive cultural habits from the host culture.

Citra also experienced a cultural clash with her friend from Vietnam due to different interaction or communication styles. The incident occurred when her Vietnamese friend touched her head. While for her Vietnamese friend, touching someone's head was

considered a gesture of affection and care, Citra regarded it as impolite behavior. Thus, she was very surprised when she found her Vietnamese friend touching her head. Citra felt offended because her Vietnamese friend touched her head.

On the other hand, her Vietnamese friend believed it was acceptable to touch her head since they were close friends. Negotiating cultural beliefs played an important role in this situation. Since Citra could not accept head-touching, even from her close friend, she tried to explain to her Vietnamese friend the significance of touching someone's head in the Indonesian context. As a result, her Vietnamese friend understood and respected Citra's cultural beliefs by refraining from touching her head again.

DISCUSSION

Studies on intercultural competence using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) framework have mainly been conducted using quantitative instruments to measure one's intercultural sensitivity and competence. Studies conducted by Barron and Dasli (2010), Kirillova et al. (2015), and Alaei and Nosrati (2018) are examples, commonly indicating positive results. In another case, a study conducted by Bloom and Miranda (2015) using a mixed-method approach revealed an interesting finding: the results of their quantitative analysis, assessed using the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI), were slightly different from the qualitative results. Their study indicated that the ISI scores showed higher levels of students' intercultural sensitivity development than those represented in the students' reflections. This is common, as people often rate themselves at a much higher level than they actually have when asked to self-assess their intercultural sensitivity and competence development (Jackson 2009; Hammer 2011; Bloom and Miranda 2015). Therefore, Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) suggested applying multiple methods to assess one's intercultural sensitivity and competence development to avoid faulty results. Relying solely on quantitative assessment is insufficient, as according to Perry and Southwell (2011), one's

intercultural sensitivity and competence development are not always as linear or progressive as Bennett's developmental stages. Following that, the present study aims to capture the contribution of individuals' international experiences toward their intercultural sensitivity and competence development and its complexities.

As highlighted by Perry and Southwell (2011), individuals' intercultural sensitivity and competence development vary. This study has revealed how individuals' intercultural sensitivity and competence manifest in different ways. It demonstrates that Budi's and Citra's intercultural competence did not progress linearly from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages. Despite being newcomers, they simultaneously exhibited both perspectives, influenced by their choices of living arrangements and intentions to respect and practice their cultural beliefs, particularly religious ones. This finding underscores that living among diverse cultures does not automatically enhance intercultural sensitivity or competence, aligning with Bennett's (2012) questioning of the impact of international experiences on such development.

Core to the transition between ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages are one's home cultural and religious beliefs. Budi's and Citra's experiences—a hug and a head touch deemed inappropriate by their cultural standards—highlight the importance of negotiation skills in avoiding cultural discomfort or withdrawal. Interestingly, their integration into the academic culture of their host country, criticizing their own while adopting new cultural values, illustrates that progression through the stages of intercultural sensitivity and competence is not sequential but can involve leaps or stagnation (Perry and Southwell, 2011).

The study also points out that factors like the multicultural environment of the host city and personal impressions of the host culture significantly influence individuals' intercultural development. Thus, the research reveals the intricate dynamics of intercultural competence development, challenging the notion of a simple progression through its stages and emphasizing the impact of context (Moore-Jones, 2018), situational factors, and interpersonal encounters.

It suggests that not advancing along the developmental continuum does not necessarily indicate intercultural incompetence, offering a nuanced view of intercultural competence development.

Furthermore, this research highlights the complex interplay between contextual, personal, and cultural factors in promoting intercultural competence. It challenges the typical portrayal of Chinese learners put forth by Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) by highlighting their varied reactions in intercultural environments, similar to the results obtained from Sahin's study (2008) on Turkish pre-service teachers in the United States, who demonstrated significant development on both professional and personal levels. These findings imply that intercultural competence is molded by a range of factors, not solely cultural background, encouraging learners to critically assess and merge novel educational methods with their existing knowledge.

Such processes reflect a shift from a deterministic view of cultural impact towards recognizing a more fluid interaction between an individual's cultural origins, personal drives, and the nuances of their educational contexts, as also mentioned by Peng and Wu (2019) and Taguchi and Collentine (2018). Sahin's work, alongside narratives from individuals like Budi and Citra, underscores the transformational nature of intercultural experiences in promoting not only professional skills but also personal development and cultural sensitivity.

Additionally, the studies address the challenges in integrating technology and managing teaching responsibilities within cultural immersion, suggesting that effective international programs should include robust support mechanisms to facilitate learners' intercultural adaptation. This approach highlights the significance of designing educational experiences that cater to both academic achievement and personal growth, advocating for a comprehensive understanding of intercultural competence as a multifaceted construct influenced by an array of individual and contextual factors.

CONCLUSION

The main goal of this present study is to capture the contribution of Indonesian EFL teachers' experiences living abroad toward their intercultural sensitivity and competence. The result of this study highlights that one's intercultural sensitivity and competence cannot be constantly assessed in a progressive way, from less competent to more competent. Instead, one's intercultural sensitivity and competence may flexibly alter depending on the situation and conditions faced at that moment. This finding confirms previous research and contributes additional evidence that recommends employing a qualitative approach in assessing one's intercultural sensitivity and competence. Additionally, an individual's impression toward cultural experiences should also be considered, as it may contribute to one's intercultural sensitivity and competence development.

Following this, several limitations to this pilot study need to be acknowledged. First, the period of time after returning home from abroad needs to be taken into account for further research. The longer the time after the return period, the more one may forget about the experiences they had. A shorter time frame may not only help the researcher obtain richer data but also assist in constructing the story in a more chronological order. Second, gender, age, and marital status are not the focus of this study, all of which may also contribute to the research results. Therefore, this can be a recommendation for future research.

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